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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

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27 June 1974

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence
SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Surprise in Starting a War

1. The enclosed Intelligence Information Special Report is part of a series now in preparation based on the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought'. This article assesses the role of surprise attack in nuclear warfare, which increased immeasurably in importance because of the sophistication of modern weapons. The first obligation of the command and staffs of all levels is to make a thorough theoretical evaluation of the possibility of a surprise nuclear attack and to search for methods of preventing and thwarting it. Since this is a task of the utmost difficulty, the importance of well-organized reconnaissance, an effective early detection and warning system, and combat with enemy reconnaissance are stressed. This article appeared in Issue No. 1 (83) for 1968.

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William E. Nelson
Deputy Director for Operations

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Intelligence Information Special Report

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COUNTRY USSR

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SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Surprise in Starting a War

SOURCE Documentary
Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 1 (83) for 1968 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal 'Military Thought'. The author of this article is Colonel-General A. Radziyevskiy. This article assesses the role of surprise attack in nuclear warfare, which increased immeasurably in importance because of the sophistication of modern weapons. The first obligation of the command and staffs of all levels is to make a thorough theoretical evaluation of the possibility of a surprise nuclear attack and to search for methods of preventing and thwarting it. Since this is a task of the utmost difficulty, the importance of well-organized reconnaissance, an effective early detection and warning system, and combat with enemy reconnaissance are stressed.

End of Summary

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Comment:

Colonel-General Aleksey Ivanovich Radziyevskiy is Chief-of-Staff of the Frunze Military Academy. His most recent articles concerning World War II appeared in Voyenno- Istoricheskiy Zhurnal, No. 6, 1972 and Soviet Military Review, No. 7, 1971. The SECRET version of Military Thought was published three times annually and was distributed down to the level of division commander. It reportedly ceased publication at the end of 1970.

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Surprise in Starting a War
by
Colonel General A. Radziyevskiy

The development of means of armed combat, primarily rocket/nuclear weapons, which possess not only immense power but also a high state of readiness for immediate use, gives especially forceful emphasis to the urgency of the problem of a surprise outbreak of war under modern conditions. The acuteness of this problem is further corroborated by the fact that in the possible theaters of military operations the probable enemies have large-scale groupings of ground, air, and naval forces deployed, combat-ready and armed with a large number of nuclear attack means. At the same time, they are implementing comprehensive measures to prepare the theaters of military operations for the conduct of nuclear war.

It is known that surprise attack, as a means of starting a war, was widely used in past wars by aggressive imperialist powers, especially fascist Germany and imperialist Japan. In all cases, surprise gave the attacker enormous advantages, and, as a rule put the side under attack in a difficult position. In the historical sense this subject has been discussed in sufficient detail in many works.

We shall recall only the most important examples. As a result of the surprise attack against Poland in September 1939, the armed forces of fascist Germany destroyed the main Polish aviation forces and achieved complete air supremacy in the very first days of the war. The surprise German Air Force bombing of the main airfields in Holland, Belgium, and Northern France on 10 May 1940 resulted in heavy aviation losses to these countries which expedited the offensive of the German ground forces and the rapid defeat of the main forces of the Anglo-French bloc. The surprise Japanese air strike against the US naval base at Pearl Harbor in December 1941 drastically changed the correlation of forces at sea in Japan's favor, and changed the entire strategic situation in the western Pacific.

We should not forget that this was done in wars without the use of nuclear weapons.

The object lessons of history force us to take a very serious approach to assessing the role of surprise attack in nuclear war. Furthermore, the current complex and critical international situation obligates us, as well. Recent events indicate that reactionary circles of the imperialist states, and primarily of the US and the Federal Republic of Germany, continue to

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nurture plans of a surprise attack against the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Much attention is devoted to finding ways of achieving surprise which, due to rocket/nuclear weapons, is regarded by bourgeois theorists as one of the basic prerequisites for victory in a general nuclear war; and US military leaders consider surprise a component of national policy.

The greatest danger is that NATO leaders, over a long period of time, have undertaken broad practical measures to ensure the achievement of surprise, combining these measures with the process of preparing for war as a whole. These measures permeate the most important aspects of the activity of the principal imperialist states and are implemented in the economic, political, and military spheres.

Under these conditions, comprehensive theoretical development and practical solution of the problems associated with preempting and thwarting a possible surprise nuclear attack by the probable enemy have become vitally important. An underestimate of the surprise factor, which recently has emerged in our military literature, can lead to incorrect orientation of our military cadres both in the sphere of the theoretical development of these problems and in the practical instruction and training of troops.

The book Military Art in Rocket/Nuclear War, which appeared in 1967, for example, states: "Today we are capable of making timely detection not only of the beginning of an attack, but also the direct preparation of the attack, and consequently can immediately deliver a crushing retaliatory nuclear strike. The development of electronic means has resulted in the fact that surprise is gradually losing its real significance, if indeed it has not already lost its importance."* This, in essence, negates any importance of surprise.

We are deeply convinced that such questioning of the role of surprise in nuclear war cannot be considered proper from either the theoretical or practical points of view. It does not fully take into consideration the modern qualitative status and further prospects for the development of the means of attack that ensure surprise in starting military operations. The problem of thwarting a surprise enemy attack is discussed by the authors of the abovementioned book only in terms of detecting the initiation of immediate preparation for aggression.

* Marshal of the Soviet Union V. D. Sokolovskiy, General-Mayor M. I. Cherednichenko, Military Art in Rocket/Nuclear War, Military Publishing House, 1967, page 148.

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An objective analysis of the status and direction of the development of the armed forces of the principal states leads to the conclusion that not only has surprise in starting a nuclear war not lost its importance, but that in comparison with the past, its importance has increased immeasurably in military and political respects. This can be explained by a number of factors.

The most important of these is the change in the means of armed combat which are the material foundation for the surprise start of war. It is well known that formerly a strategic command did not have at its disposal the means for delivering powerful and deep strikes, except for strategic (long-range) aviation with conventional bombs. But modern means, possessing long operating ranges and high flight speeds, make it possible to deliver simultaneous surprise strikes in and throughout the entire depth of many theaters of military operations.

The further development of rockets and space means of attack have created the situation whereby the armed forces of both sides can initiate combat actions in an incomparably shorter time than before. It will suffice to point out that Titan and Minuteman missiles on combat duty require 1 or 2 minutes for launch preparation after receiving the signal. Naval forces, aviation, and ground forces groupings maintain a high state of combat readiness in the probable theaters of military operations. Under these conditions there is no longer a need to implement extensive preparatory measures such as prevailed during World Wars I and II.

Consequently, with the changes in weapons and the nature of armed combat, the time which the side under attack has to bring its armed forces to combat readiness and organize and deliver a retaliatory strike has undergone a continuous process of reduction. For example, the flight time of intercontinental ballistic missiles from the US to the USSR totals 25 to 30 minutes, and Polaris missiles require 9 to 10 minutes from the northeastern Atlantic, the Mediterranean Sea, and other areas.

One often hears the opinion that under modern conditions an enemy supposedly will not begin a war without first bringing his armed forces groupings in the theaters of military operations to full combat readiness, deploying them, and implementing mobilization and other large-scale measures, or without taking steps to protect the population. And that this will allow us to detect his war preparations and will diminish the element of surprise in the attack. But we cannot fail to take into consideration that the aggressor, in attempting to achieve strategic surprise, can attack with the strategic nuclear forces and means that are already deployed and in a state of high combat readiness, and that he can bring his ground forces groupings to full readiness during his initial nuclear strike.

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We must remember that, as a result of rocket and space weapon specifications and the high combat readiness of other means of armed combat, the detection of preliminary preparations for a surprise attack by strategic nuclear forces will be extremely difficult under modern conditions. The number of measures directly supporting an attack has been drastically reduced; as a result, the number of preparation indicators have decreased and preparation time has become very brief.

We also cannot agree with the assessment made by certain authors of the duration of the effect of a surprise attack on the course of an armed conflict. These authors maintain that, "In modern war the effect of the surprise factor will be of even lesser duration, not only on an operational-tactical, but also on a strategic scale. This is explained by the fact that...in the event of a surprise attack by the aggressor, modern means of destruction will allow us to undertake retaliatory measures immediately, and as a result the effect of the surprise factor will be quickly paralyzed." *

Initial nuclear strikes are capable of immediately disorganizing economic activity, government and military control, and the entire rear area of a country; inflicting heavy casualties on troops in the theaters of military operations; and thwarting the planned deployment of the armed forces and the implementation of mobilization measures. The results of initial nuclear strikes can exert decisive influence on the entire future course and outcome of a war as a whole. A comprehensive assessment of the possible consequences of a nuclear attack by an aggressor shows that paralyzing the surprise factor or reducing the duration of its effect may even be impossible in a number of cases, because of the vast destructive power of modern means. ✓

All of the foregoing allows us to conclude that not only has the problem of surprise not lost its significance under modern conditions, but on the contrary, has acquired even more importance than it had in the past. Therefore, we must not underestimate the possibilities of a surprise nuclear attack by the probable enemy. The task of our military cadres is to thoroughly study enemy forces and means, the measures he is implementing to achieve surprise and the possibilities of averting surprise; and to keep these under constant consideration when estimating the strategic situation.

* General-Mayor I. G. Zavyalov, Speed, Time, and Space in Modern War, Military Publishing House, 1965, page 94.

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Recently the command of the Anglo-American bloc has increasingly been speeding up the development primarily of those means of armed combat which it estimates will to the greatest extent ensure the achievement of a surprise attack at the beginning of a nuclear war. In this connection, the main trend in the development of the US armed forces is the steady increase in numbers of Minuteman and Polaris ballistic missiles, which currently constitute approximately 70 per cent of the overall balance of strategic nuclear forces. Although the US command also considers strategic aviation a means of supplementing intercontinental ballistic missile strikes, rearming it with high-speed B-111 aircraft also is aimed at using them for maximum surprise. In the naval forces, carrier aviation possesses a significant surprise attack capability. But tactical aviation is considered the principal means of delivering nuclear weapons in the theaters of military operations.

We shall briefly examine the fundamental conditions and methods of achieving surprise according to the views of our probable enemies.

Concealment of actions, according to US military specialists, can produce the most substantial results. Concealment means preserving the secrecy of attack preparations, the location areas of the forces and means, and operational intentions, and secretly mustering troop groupings. The surprise of an initial nuclear strike can be achieved through previously planned, comprehensive training of the armed forces under the guise of their everyday activity, and by conducting exercises and maneuvers which gradually increase the level of readiness for war. ✓

Speed, according to the views of the US command, now must be intrinsic to all actions, from preparation to completion of the strike, and especially to making decisions and disseminating them to the troops. If preparation time is prolonged, the chance of achieving surprise is drastically reduced, as are the results of the actions. Concurrently with maintaining the established armed forces groupings in a high state of combat readiness, the NATO command envisages building them up rapidly as the situation intensifies. This will be done specifically through a suitable system of alerts and signals, and a previously developed list of measures to be implemented in accordance with these signals. ✓

Using new means of armed combat in conjunction with the massive employment of already known types of weapons, in the opinion of foreign military specialists, will be conducive not only to achieving surprise at the onset of a war, but also to accomplishing tasks with less effort. Therefore, they contemplate developing new combat means further to achieve and maintain military-technical superiority.

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New methods and forms of armed combat, unexpected by an enemy, will hinder his reconnaissance activities and considerably facilitate fulfilling our own tasks. At times, however, it is impossible to achieve surprise by methods known to the enemy. In this connection, the American magazine "Military Review" stated: "New conditions require...new creative procedures. Wars were never won by obsolete methods.... Surprise is best achieved by the most unexpected application of the new principles of armed combat."

Deceiving the enemy is considered one of the important measures for achieving surprise. According to US Army field service regulations, these measures include systematically carrying out diversionary and simulated actions and extensive deception and camouflage.

Selecting the favorable moment and timing of an attack is particularly important. In this context, moment is taken to mean a particular political and strategic situation in which the opposing side is inferior to the attacker in combat readiness or when its armed forces are in a reorganization and rearming phase. Exploiting such moments provides certain advantages and often leads to seizing the initiative for an extended time period. The timing of an attack is determined on the basis of the time required to prepare his armed forces for war and coordinate preparatory measures with allies, and by taking the time of year and day, and the navigational conditions into account.

Finally, well-organized reconnaissance can ensure the achievement of strategic surprise, according to American views. Reconnaissance has the task of obtaining, analyzing, and consolidating all data about the armed forces of the socialist countries, and especially about the objectives against which nuclear strikes are to be delivered.

Imperialist intentions of a surprise nuclear strike confront Soviet military strategy with a highly important and responsible problem: to thoroughly study and research the theory and practice of our enemies on the subject of the preparing a surprise initiation of nuclear war; to constantly increase the vigilance, combat readiness, and combat effectiveness of the armed forces of the country so as not to permit, under any conditions whatsoever, a surprise nuclear attack by an aggressor against our country, and to skilfully seize the strategic initiative at the very onset of war and decisively defeat the enemy in a short time. Therefore, a thorough theoretical evaluation and a search for ways to develop forces and means, and methods of preventing and thwarting a surprise enemy nuclear attack must be the first obligation of the command and staffs of all levels.

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The difficulty of solving the problem of preventing a surprise enemy attack has increased particularly because the development of the means of attack has considerably outstripped the development of the means of defense against them. In the recent past, when the principal US nuclear delivery means was strategic aviation, the status of the air defense system of the socialist countries gave us grounds for believing that such a task was actually feasible. The recent rapid improvement of the strategic nuclear weapons and missile-carrying submarine forces of the probable enemy, the observed developmental trends of his space forces, and the current status of missile and space defenses, lead us to conclude that thwarting an enemy nuclear attack initiated by surprise on a global scale is a task of utmost difficulty at this point.

We recommend that our military theory and practice implement a number of measures to resolve this problem. We shall dwell on some of them.

First, the timely detection of preparations and the preemption of the onset of a possible enemy attack become especially important under modern conditions. All measures will be most effective if they are carefully thought out, prepared in advance, and systematically implemented in accordance with the situation.

Well-organized reconnaissance of all types is of greatest importance. A thorough knowledge of the situation, the composition and grouping of enemy armed forces, their level of combat readiness and training, and their strengths and weaknesses, permits us to expose his intentions. The basic task of reconnaissance is to determine the main enemy strategic groupings, especially of his nuclear means, in a timely manner, and to ascertain their readiness for a surprise attack.

For these purposes, strategic reconnaissance is expected to reveal the plans and the actual measures of the governments of the aggressive bloc member-states and their armed forces commands pertaining to preparation of a surprise attack, primarily their plans for, and timing of, the initial nuclear strike delivery; and to establish the purposes and nature of rebasings US strategic and tactical aviation large units and units in the European and Asiatic theaters of military operations, which usually is carried out under the guise of exercises, maneuvers, and training flights. It also has the task of detecting the initiation of the reinforcement of US and NATO naval strike forces with missile-carrying submarines and strike carriers from the reserve, their departure from bases, and their deployment in the probable areas of combat actions. All types of intelligence collection are expected to uncover the content and purposes of the measures implemented in NATO countries pertaining to the military alert

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system, and the initiation of the deployment of the combined armed forces in accordance with operational plans.

A task of paramount importance for strategic intelligence is to opportunely establish the moment at which the enemy troops are at their highest readiness for surprise attack. It is particularly important to detect beforehand the immediate preparation of missile bases to launch intercontinental ballistic missiles; this may prove to be the most reliable indication of readiness for surprise attack. This task obviously can be accomplished successfully by the fullest acquisition of data about preparatory measures for such an attack and by a thorough analysis of all available intelligence information.

Finally, strategic intelligence has the task of making a timely detection of the emergence in foreign armies of new models of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and their delivery means so that the use of these new weapons does not come as a complete surprise.

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A surprise attack by an aggressor in Europe can be ruled out if strategic intelligence carefully and continuously monitors the progress of exercise and maneuver preparations of the NATO combined armed forces which include the assignment of US and British strategic attack forces and means which in peacetime are under the national commands of these countries; and if strategic intelligence can determine the true purposes and missions of such exercises and maneuvers. Accordingly, we should always take into account the possibility that the enemy may carry out extensive and deliberate deception while preparing his surprise attack and we should also know how to recognize these measures and distinguish them from actual intentions.

Along with intelligence, the effectiveness of the early detection and warning system has acquired special significance. Its basic task consists of detecting as early as possible the missile launches begun and the take-off of enemy aircraft. To accomplish this task successfully, the early detection and warning system, encompassing all possible air and space axes, has to operate continuously and be characterized by unusual accuracy and high transmission speed capability. Only accurate information can ensure highly reliable target designation for all active air defense means. Transmission speed capability has to be calculated based on the maximum anticipated density of missile and aircraft means participating in the initial strike on various axes, so that the minimum time is spent collecting, collating and disseminating data on enemy targets. In such a unified system, all radar, communications, and control means must operate according to an overall plan.

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With early detection, and taking into account the duration of the flight of intercontinental ballistic missiles and Polaris missiles, the side under attack will have very little time available to repulse the initial nuclear strike. Obviously, there will be only enough time to transmit preestablished commands or signals to all branches of the armed forces, and to launch the strategic missiles for the retaliatory strike against the enemy.

In this connection, there has been an increase in the importance of a continuous composite estimate of the current military-political and strategic situation, the status of the probable enemy states and armed forces, and their level of readiness to start a war in determining the validity of the threat of a surprise nuclear attack being planned or actually being prepared. Also more important is rapid preparation of recommendations, based on this estimate, that the necessary measures be implemented to thwart the enemy attack. 50X1-HUM

Combat with enemy reconnaissance also is of no little importance at present. It is carried out continuously on a country-wide scale. When enemy reconnaissance means attempt to violate our air frontiers, they are vigorously destroyed. The problem of combatting enemy space reconnaissance has become particularly acute. This problem requires its own practical solution. In addition, there is the constant task of taking steps to camouflage troops and important installations, using anti-radar means, jamming enemy radio and radar means, and observing the strictest vigilance and absolute security of military secrets. *

These, in brief summary, are the most important measures to be implemented to warn of a surprise enemy attack. In this case we must make it perfectly clear that even with thorough planning and continuous implementation of these measures, it will not immediately appear possible to thwart enemy-initiated aggression. The experience of the beginning of World War II and the events in the Near East in June 1967, convincingly points this out. Therefore, even in peacetime, all the countries of the socialist camp and their armed forces are comprehensively preparing themselves to successfully thwart the aggressive designs of our probable enemies. This means that our strategic nuclear forces, in coordination with the system of the Air Defense of the Country, civil defense, and other branches of the armed forces, are expected to constantly maintain and increase their ability to deliver a crushing blow against the enemy who has prepared himself to commit aggression, and if they cannot deprive him of the opportunity to carry out his perfidious plans, then they are expected to weaken the force of his strike in the most decisive manner.

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Analysis of the experience of past wars and the status of the armed forces of the probable enemy gives us reason to believe that feasible ways to solve this problem successfully are to maintain prolonged and stable military-theoretical and military-technical superiority over the enemy, primarily in the decisive means of combat, by improving weapons and military equipment and providing them to the troops on a massive scale, and introducing new means of armed combat; to constantly maintain troops in a high state of combat readiness; and to ensure that the command and technical cadres of the armed forces are well trained.

However, the material-technical means of armed combat, no matter how powerful and sophisticated they might be, are capable only of reaching their assigned targets, and their success depends directly on the timeliness and skill with which these means are employed. We must realize that in a surprise enemy attack situation the power strength of the armed forces will be determined not only by the combat capabilities of the available forces and means, but also by their ability to be ready to fulfil their combat tasks in a severely limited period of time.

In a nuclear war, when the belligerents will attempt to defeat or exhaust the enemy in the initial strikes and deprive him of the opportunity and ability to carry on the battle, the role of armed forces combat readiness in accomplishing the task of thwarting the enemy attack increases immeasurably. Our Armed Forces are tasked with deterring imperialist preparation of a surprise nuclear strike by the high combat readiness of our troops and the ability to deliver a timely, crushing nuclear strike.

In this connection we would like to recall once more the words of V. I. Lenin, who, foreseeing the possibility of an armed attack against our country, pointed out that in the presence of a constant military threat against us from the imperialist side, it must not be said that we will only defend ourselves. "If, in the face of such constantly aggressive and hostile forces, we were to promise, as has been proposed to us, that we would never embark on certain actions, which in a military-strategic context might prove to be offensive, then we would be not only fools, but criminals." (Complete Collection of Works, Vol. 42, page 173.).

Thus our Armed Forces, in full conformity with the conclusions of military science, the demands of the Party and Government, and the urgent directives of the Ministry of Defense and of the entire military leadership, are being prepared and maintained in condition to ensure that a timely and powerful nuclear strike is delivered against the aggressor and immediately afterwards, decisive operations are conducted by all the armed forces branches to achieve their assigned goals. If the armed forces of the socialist countries are fully prepared to fulfil the tasks assigned to

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In conclusion, we will again emphasize that not only has surprise not lost its importance under current conditions; on the contrary, it has become even more acute and is one of the most vital factors in nuclear war. Underestimating the surprise of enemy actions can lead to grave consequences considering the availability of modern means of armed combat.

We are deeply convinced that the problem of thwarting a possible surprise enemy nuclear attack warrants the greatest attention and thorough research, and requires searching out the most effective ways of solving it successfully.

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them under conditions of massive employment of nuclear weapons, they will be able to fulfil them even more successfully in any other situation.

High combat readiness comprises a whole series of measures, among which the most important are the preparation of the strategic nuclear forces to deliver a timely nuclear strike and the constant readiness of air defense forces and means to repulse an enemy nuclear strike. This readiness is ensured in practice by carrying out such measures as establishing, in peacetime, armed forces groupings capable of achieving immediate strategic goals bringing the necessary number of large units and units of all the armed forces branches to full strength in personnel, transportation and material-technical means; disposing troops and basing aircraft and fleets advantageously according to their operational function; having actual operations plans available which have been developed in advance and systematically refined; establishing the necessary supplies of material-technical means; and establishing a high level of personnel combat training and excellent knowledge of how to use equipment and weapons. All of this is being done, as we well know. It is important to ensure the maximum effectiveness of all the measures being implemented and a high degree of responsibility for their timely and complete achievement.

The efficient work of the control agencies of all levels has become extremely important to timely thwarting of a surprise enemy nuclear strike. ✓
The decision to deliver a nuclear strike and to commit the forces and means of the different armed forces branches to combat must not only be made in a short period of time, but disseminated to the executors with almost lightning speed.

To this end, in peacetime the control agencies of all the armed forces branches must be kept in a status that will allow them to assume and actually effect control of all available forces and means under any of the possible conditions in which an aggressor starts a war, without waiting for the commanders and responsible staff officers to arrive at the control posts. For these purposes, at control posts which have been prepared in peacetime, carefully covered and skilfully camouflaged, and equipped with all necessary communications means, we are organizing permanent duty groups of staff officers, headed by a command representative, which are capable of bringing the troops to the required level of combat readiness and assuming temporary control of them should a surprise enemy attack be threatened. ✓

Troop control during the combat actions already in progress will depend entirely on the speed with which the information being received is assembled and analyzed, and on continuous knowledge of the status of our forces. Therefore modern technical means must be introduced more forcefully into all control echelons, and a more advanced automated control system established.

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